

north shore news

Former District of North Vancouver council candidate sues for defamation

Hazen Colbert seeks \$83K in damages for 'reckless and abusive' comments made during 2014 municipal election campaign.

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

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Former District of North Vancouver council candidate Hazen Colbert. File photo

We may be through with the 2014 municipal election, but the 2014 municipal election isn't through with us.

Former District of North Vancouver council candidate Hazen Colbert is seeking \$82,500 in damages for what he claims were "reckless and abusive" comments that may have torpedoed his 2014 election campaign.

Frequent council-watcher Doug Curran maliciously and repeatedly attacked Colbert's character and credentials, according to the claim, filed on Dec. 1, 2014, two weeks after the election.

The conflict started when Curran accessed Colbert's Facebook page in October 2014, according to the claim.

Shortly afterward, Curran alleged Colbert attended Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia, rather than the University of Victoria. The accusation is untrue, according to Colbert's claim.

Colbert graduated from the University of Victoria — a fact Curran "could not possibly, under any circumstances, be confused about," according to the claim.

But Colbert's claim fails to list specific "actionable words" allegedly used by Curran and is "unnecessary, scandalous, frivolous or vexatious, and ought to be struck," according to Curran's statement of defence.

Colbert suffered no damage to his reputation due to Curran's statements — none of which were defamatory but which were "fair comment on a matter of public interest," according to the statement of defence.

In the suit, Colbert claims Curran repeatedly defamed him, including by handing out 250 copies of a letter entitled The Real Colbert Report at an all-candidates meeting less than two weeks before the election.

The letter labelled Colbert a slanderer and called his education credentials into question, according to the suit.

The letter, which was distributed at another all-candidates meeting just days before the election, had a negative impact on Colbert's campaign, according to his claim.

Colbert garnered a "far statistically lower" voting percentage in the polling places near the all-candidate meeting where the letter was distributed, according to the claim, causing "irreparable" damage.

Colbert finished last in the election with 3.84 per cent of the votes. His best result came at Lynn Valley Community Recreation Centre, where he captured 5.6 per cent of votes cast. His worst results were at Cleveland elementary, where he captured 2.68 per cent of the votes.

Curran's "defamatory words fractured the integrity of the (democratic) process," according to the claim.

Besides \$82,500 in damages, Colbert is also asking the court to order Curran to not write or speak about Colbert for three years. Curran should also be ordered to refrain from addressing District of North Vancouver council, any North Vancouver community association, and the Liberal Party of Canada for one year, according to the claim.

Curran has asked for the claim to be dismissed.

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